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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 3 May 1999 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward herewith a copy of a letter from Mrs. Margit Savovic, President of the Yugoslav Commission for Cooperation with UNICEF and the Promotion of the Status of Women, concerning the consequences of the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for children, addressed to Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex published as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 106, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Vladislav JOVANOVIC
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex

Letter dated 27 April 1999 from the President of the Yugoslav Commission for Cooperation with UNICEF and the Promotion of the Status of Women addressed to the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund

At this time when the North Atlantic Alliance is intensifying aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with devastating consequences of the destruction already very much in evidence, we demand that an urgent action be taken to protect the three million children in Yugoslavia, their right to life, survival and development.

The aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a co-founder of the United Nations and a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, is flagrantly violating the entire Convention on the Rights of the Child and preventing its implementation.

All results achieved so far in regard to the Yugoslav Plan of Action for Children until the year 2000 have been annulled and the Plan's further implementation thwarted.

Everything that has been invested in the preparation of the Plan of Action for Women until the year 2000 has been undermined and the aggression has trampled the Rome Declaration, which virtually all mayors of Serbia and Montenegro had signed.

In NATO assaults, more than 1,000 civilians have been killed and over 4,500 injured and maimed. In the latest attack on Surdulica alone, the toll was more than 20 civilians, of whom 12 were children aged between 5 and 12. Six children were killed in Djakovica, while another 4 are in hospital. In the village of Doganovci, near Urosevac, 4 boys were killed and 2 severely maimed by a cluster bomb. In the village of Mirovac, near Podujevo, a year-old infant, Bojana Tosovic, was killed while her pregnant mother survived and is in hospital. In the bombing of the main Post Office in Pristina, three girls aged six, seven and nine were killed. In Vranje, bomb shrapnel killed 16-year old Milica Stojanovic. In the targeted passenger train bound for Thessalonike, a six-year old boy and a 16-year old girl died. Unfortunately the exact number of victims is still unknown since two wagons were incinerated. Three-year old Milica Rakic was killed by a cluster bomb shrapnel at her home in Batajnica. The number of casualties is rising by the hour.

All children, everywhere in Yugoslavia, are daily exposed to trauma and stress, with consequences already very much in evidence. On the basis of polls done so far in first-aid psychosocial counselling services for children, the chief cause of stress is the disrupted security within the family, uncertainty, fear from bombing and the separation from parents. Incomplete reports show that over 10 per cent of children have symptoms of serious psychological disorders, which require specialized therapy.

The possibility of access to health services has been reduced by 50 per cent owing to the expected start of air raid alerts and their duration. A demolished infrastructure and a constant threat to the lives of civilians and health workers are virtually an insurmountable barrier to field work and immunization. So far, 18 district health institutions and 15 municipal ones have been destroyed. Women deliver their children in the basements of hospitals and their newborns are taken to underground shelters every night.

Children suffering from malignant diseases, diabetes, children on artificial kidneys and children with chronic conditions are hardest hit. Operations are put off because of air raids. The importation of medications has become impossible, while the home pharmaceutical industry has been effectively stopped by the destruction of chemical industry, which had been the source of raw materials. The water supply is badly affected in the majority of towns.

An immediate consequence of the ecological disaster caused by fire, explosions and the destruction of installations using chlorine, ammonia and vinyl chloride, is the displacement of the population of Lucani, Baric and several other towns.

Food production has been affected by the destruction of a tractor factory, an artificial fertilizer plant and diesel fuel reserves. Salt iodination installations covering the needs of all of southern Serbia and Kosmet has been directly hit. The use of missiles with depleted uranium will leave long-term effects on the health of population, especially future mothers and children.

The destruction of industrial installations and infrastructure has led to the loss of jobs for more that 160,000 workers and left over 500,000 of their dependents without any means of livelihood. Contributions to child and social welfare funds have dropped by 85 per cent, particularly affecting children without parental care in orphanages and in foster care, and children with developmental disorders. The number of families whose income is below the poverty threshold has doubled from 30.4 per cent. According to the data from a survey on the consequence of war in the territory of former Yugoslavia, a rise in the social pathology of the young people is anticipated: juvenile delinquency, aggressiveness, abuse of alcohol and drugs, suicides and serious mental disorders.

Because of constant air raid alarms, schools closed three months before the regular end of the school year. Thus, the right to primary education of some 1,400,000 children has been violated. So far, 300 primary and secondary schools have been either demolished or damaged, leaving some 180,000 children, or 20 per cent of the total school-going population, without a place in school and without normal conditions for education once the war activities are halted. The continuation of education will be further impeded by the fact that about 1 million people, the biggest percentage of whom are children, have been displaced.

Some 70 per cent of kindergartens in Serbia, outside Kosovo and Metohija (the data for Kosovo and Metohija is still unavailable) are no longer fit to take in children. For safety reasons, less than 1 per cent of the enrolled

children are brought to kindergartens. All pre-school preparatory programmes for children have been disrupted.

The right of children to play, recreational activities, rest and leisure is gravely affected. So far 15 children's recreational centres and cultural institutions have been demolished. Children's magazines and newspapers are not published. The right to play is threatened by the very fact that children are forced to spend most of their time in air raid shelters.

More than 250,000 refugee children from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia and their parents are again experiencing war traumas. Humanitarian agencies have either reduced assistance or completely stopped their activities. Refugee centres in Djakovica, Paracin, Gucevo, Pancevo, Pristina, Kursumlija and Rakovica have been either directly targeted or severely damaged. More than 1 million people have been temporarily internally displaced owing to incessant bombings.

I am confident that, taking the principles and goals of the agency which you head as your starting point, you will condemn the NATO aggression against my country, whose most frequent direct or indirect victims are the children themselves.

(Signed) Dr. Margit SAVOVIC
President
Yugoslav Commission for Cooperation
with UNICEF and the Promotion of the
Status of Women